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ABSTRACT

To explicate the conditions under which black men and women have achieved success, using blacks as a legitimate population rather than as deviants from a majority group, factors related to academic and professional achievement by black men and women were explored. Sixty-four black professionals with doctoral degrees, including college professors, dentists, lawyers, psychologists, physicians, secondary school teachers, and scientists, were asked about personal, family background, career development, and personality factors. Results indicated that parental education was an important factor in the black professionals' family background. Black women came from middle class, well-educated families more often than did black men. They were also more likely to be unmarried, to be childless, and to express no religious affiliation. Family members were most often the influential persons who assisted in the black professional's career decisions. Most of these professionals were satisfied with their career selection and their progress in their field; those who were dissatisfied believed themselves responsible for any lack of progress. These professionals were found to be highly motivated and self-oriented. (Author/JAC)

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Professional Black Women and Men: An Exploratory Study of Their Personal and Career Development

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Running head: Black Professionals

Footnote

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ABSTRACT

Professional Black Women and Men: An Exploratory Study of Their Personal and Career Development

Professional Black women and men with doctoral degrees were surveyed in order to describe their personal/family background, career development and personality factors. Parental education was an important factor in the Black professionals' family background. Black women came from middle class, well-educated families more often than did Black men. They were also more likely to be unmarried, childless, and to express no religious affiliation. Family members were most often the influential persons who assisted in the career decisions of the professionals. Most professionals were satisfied with their career selection and their progress in their field; those dissatisfied believed themselves responsible for any lack of progress. The professionals were found to be highly motivated and self-oriented. Similarities and differences between the males and females were discussed in terms of previous finding.

Professional Black Women and Men: An Exploratory Study of Their Personal and Career Development

Many theoretical and empirical studies have examined the relatively low levels of academic achievement of Black Americans as compared to Whites and other groups in the U.S. population (Allen, 1981; Bureau of Census, 1974; Coleman, 1966; Gottfried, 1973). The barriers which must be overcome before Blacks can attain professional levels in education and employment have been well documented (Bock, 1971; Bureau of Census, 1974; Brazziel, 1970; Labov, 1972; Mitchell, 1970). Linguistic, social, and even personal factors play a role in sometimes preventing Blacks from reaching the peak both educationally and occupationally. While more than half of all individuals in professional and technical areas are White men, and 38% of such individuals are White women, fewer than 6% of the remaining positions are held by Black men and women combined (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1977). In the professions generally most highly regarded in the United States, Black representation is alarmingly sparse. Only 2.2% of Black women and men hold medical degrees, 3.4% law, and 1% engineering. In 1980 Korchin estimated that only 4.5 of the 1975 doctoral graduates in psychology were minority group members. More recently it was revealed that minorities comprise only 3% of the American Psychological Association membership, and that 3% included Blacks, Hispanics, Asians, and Native Americans (Russo, Olmedo, Stapp and Fulcher, 1981). Similarly, surveys in other disciplines indicate that percentages of Black graduates at the doctoral level has remained consistenly low for years. For example Black Ph.D.'s from business schools have constituted 1% of all such graduates for the years 1974-1978 (American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business, 1979).

With the relatively few Black women and men gaining high level academic credentials, it seems that more attention is needed to explicate the conditions

under which Black women and men have completed these accomplishments. A number of studies indicated that Black parents play an important role as influencers of their children's occupational aspirations (Bock, 1971; Gurin, 1966; Thompson, 1963). June and Fooks (1980) supported the belief that parents were key influencers of occupational choices of Black professionals, and in fact, suggested that mothers were especially effective. Other researchers have disagreed with their analysis (Gurin and Epps, 1966; Jackson, 1973). Jackson contended that low income mothers were not effective in the role of occupational influencer and reported that other models, such as teachers and counselors, were more important for the development of Black children's aspirations.

In an effort to clarify the dimensions of success and high academic achievement, Sparks (1980) investigated a number of environmental and personal factors in a study of Black professionals. He was not able to demonstrate any relationship between achievement and family income levels, geographic region, and integration experiences at the high school or college level. Additionally, contradictory data was produced with respect to sex differences for achievement levels among Blacks. It has been stated that Black women are more encouraged and more successful than Black men or White women with respect to achievement of a college education and professional status (Bock, 1971; Epstein, 1973; Gump and Rivers, 1975). The professional attainment of Black women, however, has typically been found in traditional "feminine" occupations, such as elementary school teaching; their aspirations have appeared very much constrained by gender role considerations (Murray and Mendnick, 1977). Nevertheless, Black women enter the job market with greater frequency than do White women and their motive to avoid success was found to be markedly lower (Weston and Mendnick (1970). Gump and Rivers (1975) suggested that Black women's expectations for

employment may reflect on orientation of responsibility for others rather than a self-indulgent achievement ethic. Whether or not this sense of responsibility is the same in Black men has not been investigated. Since most studies of achievement among Blacks have utilized elementary school or college student populations, many questions remain concerning the relationship between academic achievement and level of professional attainment.

Much of the available research on achievement of Blacks and other minorities has approached the issue from a "psychology of race differences" tradition (Korchin, 1980). The race differences tradition suggests a deficiency in the minority group which must be determined relative to the White comparison group. Yet, research in recent years cautions against any overly confident interpretation of findings gathered while using the race differences perspective, since racial groups are extremely complex and difficult to define. Despite cautions, however, the assumption persists that any controlled and appropriate investigation of minorities must include a White comparison group (Korchin, 1980). Studies are needed which describe and define Black and other minority populations as legitimate populations not merely as deviants from a majority group.

This investigation was conducted to explore factors in the lives of Black professionals which are commonly held by them and which might be related to high achievement. While there may well be similarities to factors important for White high achievers, and in fact, such a comparison would constitute a worthwhile effort, this study seeks only to explicate these dimensions for Blacks. The question, whether factors related to high achievement in Blacks are similar to or different from those for Whites, was left to other investigations. The present study was designed to identify factors which might relate to high levels of academic and professional achievement attained by

Black women and men and to investigate possible sex differences between them. Family background factors, career and personal traits were defined as important areas for study based upon past findings (June and Fooks, 1980; Gump, 1972; Weston and Mednick, 1970).

Method

Participants

The participants were 64 Black professionals, 30 men and 34 women. Each participant held a doctoral degree appropriate to his or her field. The professionals represented in this study identified themselves as college professors (10), dentists (15), lawyers (8), psychologists (10), physicians (12), secondary school teachers (4), and scientists (3).

The criterion for sample selection was set as the attainment of one of the following degrees: Ph.D., Ed.D, J. D., M. D., or D.D.S. The directories of minority researchers from the National Science Foundation and from Division 35 (Division of Psychology of Women) of the American Psychological Association were used to identify some Black professionals. In addition, a directory of graduates for 1964-66 from Howard University (a major university which grants large numbers of terminal degrees to Black students) was used to contact graduates. A total of 206 professionals were identified as potential participants for this inquiry.

Some of the mailed surveys (28%) were returned because of incorrect address. The actual contact group, therefore, consisted of 149 professionals. Completed questionnaires were received from 69 respondents, these represented a 46% response rate. Three respondents, however, were White and two did not hold terminal degrees. Their responses were not included in the analyses. Among the respondents were twelve physicians, fifteen dentists, ten college

professors, four secondary school teachers, eight lawyers, ten psychologists, three physical scientists, and two pharmacists. Each held a terminal degree appropriate to his/her area.

This group of Black professionals was not a random, nor necessarily a representative sample. The respondents were, however, a nationally obtained group. Due to the limited number of participants and self-selection sample bias, these findings are best characterized as exploratory. It should be noted, however, that this sample of Black professionals compares favorably with samples utilized in other studies most notably the Epstein (1973) study which has been the classic on Black professional women for the last decade.

Questionnaire

An omnibus questionnaire consisting of 75 items was constructed to describe three dimensions of the professionals' experiences: personal/family background, career development, and personality factors.

The personal/family background section of the questionnaire consisted of demographic items and a scale measuring degree of agreement with parents on career, personal, and social issues. The career development section contained questions about the respondents' satisfaction with his/her career, the existence of a mentor, and perception of barriers to personal success. The personality factors section of the questionnaire, contained the autonomy-power scale, mastery scale, social comparison, and social efficacy measures (Veroff, McClelland and Ruhland, 1975), the Fand Inventory Factors (Gump, 1972), a self-concept measure (Tangri, 1972), and a subscale for conservatism and traditionalism in family ideology from the California F Scale (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson and Sanford, 1950).

Procedure

The questionnaire was mailed in February 1982 along with a one-page cover letter from the investigators explaining the nature of the study and the procedures utilized to ensure confidentiality and anonymity of respondents. A self-addressed, postage paid envelope for returning the questionnaire was included to increase the likelihood of responding and to facilitate the return of the questionnaire. Reminder postcards were mailed to all individuals contacted about two weeks after the initial mailing. Response categories were coded and analyzed using descriptive statistics primarily.

Results

The responses to the questionnaire have been summarized for each of the three areas assessed: personal/family background, professional development, and personality factors. The chi square technique was used to assess gender differences in personal/family background and professional development. For the measures of personality, correlations were used to explore possible relationships.

Personal/Family Background

Background Summary. A summary of the data obtained from the personal/family background section of the questionnaire revealed the following information: age ranged in years from the "under 30" to the "55-60" category with a mean category of "35-40"; forty-five percent of the professionals were first-borns reared in relatively large families; their mean number of siblings was 2.2 (s.d.=2.2). Most professionals (63%) had mothers who worked outside of the home while rearing the family. The educational attainment of the parents of these professionals ranged from the elementary school level to graduate

degrees. Mothers of professionals were on the average more educated than the fathers. More mothers (73.8%) graduated from high school compared to fathers (58.1%). On the other hand, fathers were more likely to possess a graduate degree (16.1%) than were mothers (7.9%). A breakdown of the educational attainments of professionals' parents is presented in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here.

The majority of professionals indicated agreement with both mothers and fathers in all areas surveyed. The degree of agreement with mothers was, however, higher than that with fathers (59% to 50% on social issues, 67.2% to 54.7% on political issues, and 70.3% to 68.8% on career goals).

The marital status of the professionals was married (67.2%), single-never married (15.6%), divorced (9.4%), and widowed (3.1%); 4.7% did not respond to this question. Of the professionals who were married all except one were married to other Black Americans. The one exception was married to a Black Jamaican. Spouses were well educated with over 60% holding graduate degrees. The majority of the professionals (70%) had at least one child, 30% had none. The average number of children was 1.7.

Participants also indicated their religious preferences. Seventy-nine percent identified with some traditional religious group, however, 21% of the participants reported none. The most frequently identified religious preference was Baptist (35.9%). The professionals' religiosity was also measured by their reported attendance of religious services. Only 28% of the participants indicated that they attended services frequently, 39% respondend "occasionally," and 33% "rarely."

Background Sex Differences. Cross-tabulations of the personal/family background factors revealed sex differences in a number of areas. Significant differences were found in marital status, education of spouse, and number of children among other factors. More women than men were never married (20.6% of women compared to 10% of the men). Twice as many women as men were childless, 41.2% of women to 16.7% of the men. Men were, in fact, more likely to have three or more children. A breakdown of the number of children by the sex of the professional is shown in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 about here.

Religious practices of men and women also differed. Women were more likely to respond that they rarely attended religious services than were men, 44.1% compared to 20% respectively. Of those professionals who were married, the women reported a significantly higher percentage of spouses with graduate degrees (84.2% of women's spouses had graduate degrees compared to 25% of men's), $\underline{X}^2 = 20.9$, $p < .001$. The breakdown of spouse's educational level by sex of the professional is shown in Table 3. Female professionals also had more highly educated fathers than did male professionals., $\underline{X}2 = 13.5$, $p < .05$. The percentage breakdown of educational attainment of parents of male and female professionals is shown in Table 4.

Insert Tables 3 and 4 about here.

Career Development

The professionals surveyed had worked in their respective areas of expertise for an average of 11.3 years. The range was from the category "under 5 years" to the category "over 26 years." Most respondents were satisfied with their occupational goals. Asked if they would pursue a different career if possible, 58% respondent "no". Slightly more men than women responded with an alternative career goal (24% vs. 17%). Satisfaction in their chosen field was reportedly due to personal challenge and satisfaction of their work (41%), altruistic opportunities (32%), and the independence (19%). The professionals believed that communication skills (28.1%), intelligence (18.8%), and specific abilities (15.6%) were necessary for their occupational success.

More than half (53%) of the participants were satisfied that their careers were progressing as they should. Asked if they should be further ahead in their fields than they were, 47% answered "yes". Of these who expressed dissatisfaction with their career progress, most (72%) felt that personal deficiencies had held them back. Specific comments included "I haven't placed greatest priority on writing", "should be doing more research", "not enough experience", and "not attending an Ivy League School". Only a few of the responses (13%) could be interpreted as suggesting that racism or sexism was the major reason for a lack of career progress. Examples of these were the comments, "being black", "being female", and "clients believe that lawyers of other ethnic groups can provide better services". Five female professionals (15% of the women) felt that their concern with their families had hindered somewhat their career development. Some comments were "choice to be a mother first, and career second", "small children", and "responsibilities at home".

More than half (58%) of the professionals reported the existence of some person who influenced their choice of career. The influential person was

described as having ambition (46%), intelligence (26%) and as caring and loving (36.5%). The most frequently cited influential persons were mothers and fathers (13.3%, 13.3%). Teachers were cited (11%), spouses and other relatives (10%), and other non-relatives (11%). More women than men claimed no one particular influential person (50% to 37%, respectively).

Personality Factors

Personality summary. The mean score on the autonomy power scale was 6.4 (s.d.=1.36), with the highest possible score an 8. The mean for the mastery scale was 4.0 (s.d.=1.50) on a total scale of 6 points. Since both scores were towards the high end of their respective scales, the affiliative orientation for the professionals seemed low and the interpretation of a high motive for control and achievement was made.

The social comparison items indicated a strong desire by the participants for positive social comparison (M = .78, s.d. = .49) and a motive for assertive competence (M= 34, s.d.=.48). Thus, the competence motivation was interpreted as high based upon the participants' interest in determining relative standing from comparisons to a national sample rather than to a sample of other Black professionals. The personal efficacy score (M= 1.7, s.d.= .52) was also high and demonstrated an overall confidence the respondents had in their own personal ability.

The items from the California F scale (Adorno et al, 1950) measured submission, authoritarianism, and aggression. The mean score was 4.3 (s.d.= 2.80) indicating tolerance and a lack of rigidity and authoritarian values. The Fand Inventory mean score demonstrated a strong orientation toward self fulfillment (M= 2.72, s.d.=2.71) and low other-orientation (M= .41, s.d.= .75). Finally, on the self-concept scale, the professionals described

themselves as highly self-reliant, conventional, successful, competent, independent, and for male respondens highly masculine, for females highly femirine. See Table 5 for the means and standard deviations of males' and females' scores on the personality measures.

Personality sex differences. Women described themselves as significantly less conventional than the men on the self-concept scale ($t(62) = 1.64$, $p < .02$) and on the F scale ($t(62) = 2.9$, $p < .005$). No sex differences were found for the scales of self-orientation or mastery.

Relationships among factors. Correlations among family/background factors and personality measures revealed a meaningful relationship between mastery and parents' educational attainment ($r = -.28$, $p < .01$ and $r = -.26$, $p < .02$, for mothers' and fathers' respectively). The relationship suggested that professionals with highly educated parents were more affiliative than those of less educated parents. Correlations among career development factors and personality measures indicated that self-orientation was related to satisfaction with career ($r = -.23$, $p < .04$), an indication that higher self-orientation was related to altruistic motivation. Expectation of becoming well-known was related to score on the autonomy-power scale, $r = .22$, p .04, i.e., high independence and control correlated with high expectation.

Insert Table 5 about here.

Discussion

The sample of Black men and women surveyed in this study represented career areas in which the achievement of a terminal degree was assumed to indicate high achievement motivation. As a group, these professionals were

characterized by traditionality with respect to their personal and family attributes. The majority were married, moderately religious, and had small families typical of the middle class. About half of the sample group was firstborn from moderately large families. The mothers of these professionals were educated, working women, who often surpassed the fathers in educational attainment. It was interesting to note that while a greater percentage of mothers than fathers had graduated from high school, equivalent percentages of fathers and mothers had obtained professional degrees.

Several differences existed between the male and female professionals in this group. For example, men were significantly more likely than women to have married and to have several children. It was not clear what influenced the marital status of Black women in this sample. Perhaps, the small pool of eligible Black men combined with a decision not to "marry down" resulted in their lower rate of marriage. Unlike Epstein's sample (1973), over eighty percent of the Black women who were married had spouses with equivalent educational attainment. Furthermore, the relationship between fertility and the educational attainment of women is well documented by the Bureau of Census (Moore & O'Connel, 1978). The fact that professional Black women have fewer children than Black men may best be explained by the direct effects careers have on women, i.e., postponement of motherhood and the lessening of physical resources, such as time to allocate to childrearing. A number of women in the sample referred to the conflict of the dual commitment they felt to their careers and their children. None of the men referred to such a problem.

The relationship of parental educational attainment for the male and female professional was not unexpected. Other researchers have reported that mothers in Black families often have higher educational status than fathers (Epstein, 1973). Astin (1969) also found that White doctoral level women had

highly educated parents. In this survey too, Black professional women indicated that their parents had higher levels of education than did those of the professional men. It would seem, then, that while men had families with a diversity of educational backgrounds, professional Black women were more likely to come from middle-class families with highly educated fathers. Additional support for the belief in the importance of family influences on Black professionals was obtained from several responses. Both men and women indicated strong agreement with their parents, especially in the area of career goals. Parents were also frequently cited as the persons who influenced early career decisions.

The high number of women as compared to men in this sample who reported no religious affiliation appeared consistent with other personality characteristics which represented these Black women as unlikely to behave in conventional ways. Whereas some researchers have suggested that Black women have expectations for employment due to their sense of responsibility and traditionality (Gump & Rivers, 1975; Murray & Mednick, 1977), the professional women in this sample were as highly motivated by strivings for competence and power as the men. In fact, these women were found to have an even higher "self-orientation", as opposed to an "other orientation", than the men.

In their professional lives the participants were satisfied with the careers which they had selected. Having worked on the average over ten years, they indicated that their job satisfaction came from the personal challenges involved in their duties and the opportunity to help by providing services and expertise. Although half of the participants felt that their career progress was satisfactory, others believed themselves held back by problems of their own making. This tendency to attribute career problems to themselves was consistent with their self-descriptions as independent and autonomous. In

other words, for success as well as for disappointments, these professionals saw themselves in control of their careers.

The responses of these Black professionals to the questions related to family background, career development and personality have suggested a number of characteristics and attitudes which seem representative of professional achievement. While a cautious interpretation of these findings was necessary due to sampling bias, important relationships have been suggested. Future research in the area of career development for Blacks should attempt to survey more participants, including Blacks who are nonachievers, as well as white achievers and nonachievers. The ultimate goals would serve not only to better understand the influencing factors involved in Black achievement, but also to identify those conditions which may encourage achievement in Black youth.

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TABLE 1.

Educational Levels of Black Professionals' Parents

Parents	Educational Level			
	Less Than High School	Graduate	College, College Graduate	Graduate School
Fathers n=62*	41.9%	19.3%	21.0%	16.1%
Mothers n=61*	26.2%	31.1%	27.9%	14.7%

* N does not equal 64 due to subjects' ommission of information.

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TABLE 2.

Educational Levels of Spouses of Black Male and Female Professionals

Professional	Spouse 's Educational Level			
	Less Than College Graduate	College Graduate	Master's Degree	Terminal Degree
Male n = 24*	16.7%	45.8%	12.5%	25.0%
Female n - 19*	10.5%	0.0%	5.4%	84.2%

*The number of professionals reporting spouse's education

TABLE 3.

Percentages of Professional Black Men and Women with Children

	Children		
Professional	None	1 - 2	3 or more
Men n = 30	16.6%	36.7%	46.7%
Women n = 34	41.2%	38.2%	20.6%

TABLE 4.

Educational Levels of Parents of Black Professional Men and Women

Parents	Professional	Educational Level			
		Less Than High School	High School Graduate	College, College Graduate	Graduate School
Fathers	Male n=29	48.2%	31.0%	3.4%	17.2%
	Female n=23	36.4%	9.1%	36.4$	18.2%
Mothers	Male n=28	32.1%	32.1%	21.4%	14.3%
	Female n=33	21.2%	30.2%	33.3%	15.1%

TABLE 5.

Means and Standard Deviations of Black Male and Female Professionals on Personality Measures

	Males		Females	
Measure	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
Autonomy-Power	6.30	1.09	6.44	1.58
Efficacy	1.67	.55	1.73	.51
F-Scale	5.33	2.86	3.38	2.49
Mastery	4.00	1.64	4.00	1.39
Other- Orientation	.43	.63	.38	.85
Self -Orientation	2.13	.90	3.23	3.57
Self-Concept				
Self-reliance	1.90	.88	1.79	.73
Unconventional	2.87	1.48	3.70	1.63
Successful	2.10	1.15	2.18	.94
Competent	1.53	.86	1.59	.86
Independence	5.00	1.76	5.18	1.57
Intelligent	2.20	.99	2.03	.83